

KC-made film gets fest attention

Director Amy McClung was only 20 when she made the gay-themed 'Change of Life.'

By ROBERT W. BUTLER
The Kansas City Star

"Change of Life," a low-budget religious fantasy shot in Kansas City by a 20-year-old woman, is getting quite a buzz on the festival circuit.

So far it has been booked at the Great Lakes Independent Film Festival (where it was named best film with a religious/spiritual theme), the L.A. Femme Film Festival, the International Film Festival South Africa, the Sansea Bay fest (Wales) and the Phuket, Thailand, International Film Festival.

Amy McClung was only 20 when she shot it in 2006. A native of Washington state, McClung four years ago moved to Fort Leavenworth, where her father, a colonel in the U.S. Army, was stationed. Currently she is a film student at KU.

Producer/writer Jon Weimer met McClung through her mother, who was enrolled in one of his university classes. He was impressed with the young woman's maturity and her identification with the story he'd written.

"Change of Life" centers on an evangelical minister whose followers persecute gays and lesbians. When his own daughter is outed and subsequently kills herself, the minister prays for a second chance. The next morning he awak-



Amy McClung: Is she one of KC's best filmmakers?

ens to find that time has rewound and that his daughter is alive, except that her soul now inhabits the body of a gay man.

Weimer, who usually specializes in horror stories, said he was inspired to write the script when he and his wife were accosted by followers of Topeka minister Fred Phelps at a screening of a gay-themed film in Lawrence. His film's blend of social allegory and family drama was influenced by Melvin Van

Peebles' "Watermelon Man" (1970) and Charles Beaumont's 1962 "Twilight Zone" episode "Person or Persons Unknown."

"Amy had just come out to her parents when we met," Weimer said. "We got to talking and I said, 'Gee I have this story you might be interested in.' I told her I didn't think I had the subtlety to handle it, but that if she was interested, she should do it."

"And when I saw some of the music videos she directed in Washington, I was blown away. She's a much better director than I am. ... I think she's better than anyone now in the Independent Filmmakers Coalition."

Weimer funded the production from his own savings. Local actors worked free. KCUR and KCPT-TV donated the use of their studios, and Broadway Church and the Westport CoffeeHouse were primary locations.

Weimer said he didn't back the film for profit but to make a statement.

"Too many people who claim to be Christian act in very un-Christian ways," he said. "Christ never mentions homosexuality. But he does command us to love one another and not to judge others. Somehow, evangelicals always seem to gloss over those passages."

For more information and to see clips of "Change of Life" go to www.changeoflifemovie.com or go to www.facebook.com and search for Change of Life.

Get 'Stuck'

Need a yuk? Check out www.dikenga.com/films/stuck and watch the trailer for "Stuck," the latest opus from Wamego, Kan., filmmaker Steve Balderson ("Firecracker").

Featuring Balderson regulars Karen Black, Susan Traylor and Mink Stole, "Stuck" looks like a dead-on spoof of '50s women-in-prison movies: black-and-white photography, lurid camera angles and cheesy bongo-flavored music. If the actual film is half as funny as the preview, it ought to be a hoot.

'Night Is the Mirror'

The Screenland Crossroads on Oct. 17 will host the premiere and DVD release party for "Night Is the Mirror," a locally made film starring cabaret band Alacartoon and featuring vocalist Erin McGrane.

Blending reality and fantasy, the feature-length movie is set in a forgotten cabaret. Over one night, music and dreams collide in "live performances that aren't live, interviews that don't answer questions and journeys of great expanses with little progress."

The film — produced by Phil Kinen, directed by Brian Hicks and funded by an "inspiration grant" from the ArtsKC Fund — will be screened at 7 and 9:30 p.m. Alacartoon will give a live show.

For ticket information visit www.screenland.com. For Alacartoon info go to www.alacartoon.com.